

The Twelfth Century Perrot family in Wales – A Tudor forgery?

By Anne Rees

‘The Perrots were a Pembrokeshire phenomenon and represent the classic tale of a family’s rise from obscurity to dominance in the space of two centuries. Contrary to the historically accepted story, they first appear in the county not in the 1120s but in 1290s post-conquest Wales. They were advenae esquires or new blood of English origin who established themselves as military tenants of the de Valence earls of Pembroke’. R.K.Turvey.¹

IN HIS 1988 doctoral thesis, Dr Roger Turvey – now the acknowledged international authority on this subject – contended that Sir John Perrot invented the first five generations of his line by skillful expropriation and adaptation of Cymric traditions. His son Sir James² and Lewys Dwnn, Deputy Clarenceux King of Arms³ were held to be complicit, whether witting or unwitting, in this fabrication.

Dr Turvey writes: *‘Without exception, the three contemporary genealogies are accurate with respect to the main descent, beginning with Stephen Perrot who lived at the end of the thirteenth-century. However, this cannot be said of the first five generations mentioned in the respective texts. These lack corroborative evidence and the brief details accompanying the entries are scarcely believable. It would seem that Sir John Perrot’s desire to establish an impressive pedigree knew no bounds, as he promoted a link with two royal Welsh rulers. In fact, the Perrot link with the princely houses of Deheubarth and Gwynedd bears all the hallmarks of sixteenth century invention and self-esteem’.*^{4,1}

Thus E.L.Barnwell’s long-accepted account of early generations – based primarily on the pedigrees of Lewys Dwnn, Sir James Perrot in the biography of his father, Sir John, and the fifteenth century Haroldston Calendar – is summarily dismissed: *‘Barnwell generally accords the sixteenth-century genealogies far too much respect....There is little doubt that this description of the family’s origins is absurd and has no foundation in fact’.*^{4,1}

The same thesis also boldly questioned the orthodox narrative that the Perrots arrived in Wales in the 12th century, citing in support Henry Owen’s ‘Old Pembroke Families’ which contains an oft-quoted and challenging observation: *‘The founder of the house is said to have been Stephen Perrot, who, in the reign of Henry I, acquired lands at Narberth and married the heiress of Jestynton (Eastington), but the earlier descents in the pedigree cannot be adapted to the dates, and furnish another proof that little reliance can be placed on any Welsh pedigree before the 14th century’.*⁵

The examination of Stephen of Popton and his traditional antecedents is predictably brief and endorses Owen's sweeping statement above. "With Stephen, the son of Peter, we stand on surer ground", so stated Henry Owen and he is undoubtedly right. So is his belief "that little reliance can be placed on any Welsh pedigree before the fourteenth century". In fact, so far as reliable evidence is concerned,

Stephen must be regarded as the true founder of the Perrot family fortunes in the county of Pembroke'.^{4,2}

Having thus disposed of previous generations recorded in contemporary pedigrees as fictional, Dr Turvey explores a possible alternative and much later date for the family's arrival in south west Wales:

'It may be significant that Sir Ralph Perrot V of the Kent branch served in south Wales against Llywelyn ap Gruffydd in 1257..... After receiving a pardon, he served with the king, Edward I, in Wales against the Welsh in 1277-83. It is known that his son and heir, also called Ralph, served with his father in the first Welsh war of 1277; may Stephen Perrot have been a younger son, accompanying his father and elder brother to Wales and deciding to stay there and carve out his own career?'

If this was correct, then just why Sir John Perrot – who was personally acquainted with Rice Perrot, a member of the Kent branch of the family and his father-in-law's bailiff – should wish to omit his own great grandfather from his pedigree, or indeed substitute a bogus Norman ancestor for a genuine one, is puzzling.

Similarly, there seems little likelihood that his highly-respected Parliamentary son Sir James – 'a man of outstanding ability and in his religious beliefs, a Christian of passionate, if puritan, piety'⁶ – along with the celebrated bard and appointed herald Lewys Dwnn, would be willing parties to any dubious enterprise. Their efforts to extend the Perrot genealogy were clearly undertaken with the necessary knowledge and care; indeed there is some evidence both used the same earlier pedigree of Sir Owen Perrot from the collection of George Owen of Cemaes as a common source.⁷

<p>14 The LIFE of</p> <p>AND that this may appear to be a Truth, and no fayned Fable, here followeth the lineal Discent and Pedegree of Sir John Perrott, and his Auncethors, from theyre first Arrivall into Pembroke-shire.</p> <p>PERROTT came out of Normandy into England with William the Conqueror, as it appeareth by the Chronickles, and by the Records of Battaye Abbey.</p> <p>1. STEPHEN Perrott came into Pembroke-shire in the Rayn of King Henry the First, and he married with Elynor Lady of Ifington, Daughter and sole Heyre of Marchion ap Rice, being the fourth Discent from Howell Dda, King of South Wales, and the Llyngur or Lawmar-ker of that Land.</p> <p>2. SIR Andrew Perrott, Knight, the Sonne of Stephen Perrott, of Ifington, married Jennett Mortimer, Daughter of Ralph</p>	<p>Sir John Perrott, Kt. 15</p> <p>Ralph Lord Mortimer, who was afterwards Earle of March, whose Mother was Gladis Dee, Daughter to Llewellyn ap Iorwerth Kinge of South Wales. This Sir Andrew Perrott builded the Castell of Herberth in Pembroke-shire, and placed there a Garrison of Flemynge, who were sent into that Shier.</p> <p>3. WILLIAM Perrott, Esquier, of Ifington, married Margaret, the Daughter of Sir Walter Herford, Knight.</p> <p>4. PETER Perrott, Esquier, of Ifington, married the Daughter of Caington, in the Countie of Pembroke.</p> <p>5. STEPHEN Perrott of Ifington, Esquier, married Maby Castellon, Daughter and Heyre of Castellon in the sayd Countie.</p> <p>6. JOHN Perrott of Ifington, Esquier, married Jonett Joye, Daughter and Heyre to Sir John Joye of Prendle-goff, Knight.</p>
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Pedigree as given in Sir John Perrot's Biography by his son Sir James.

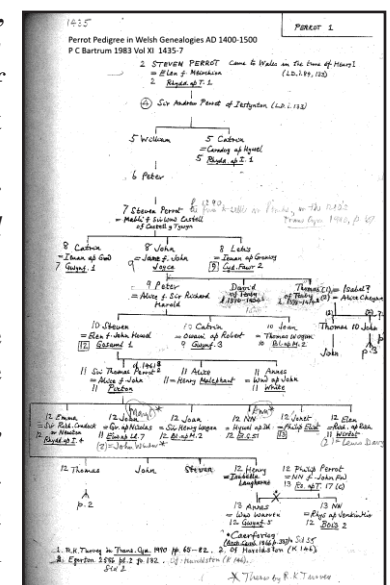
Nevertheless, importing a completely new proband into Pembrokeshire from Kent in the early 14th century does lift the considerable burden of reconciling significant gaps and conflicts in the surviving genealogies before that time. The case would have been further strengthened if a Stephen was recorded as the son of Ralph Perrot but that is not the case. The name Stephen (or Peter) does not feature anywhere in Cockayne's 400 year pedigree of the Perrot family of Kent.⁸

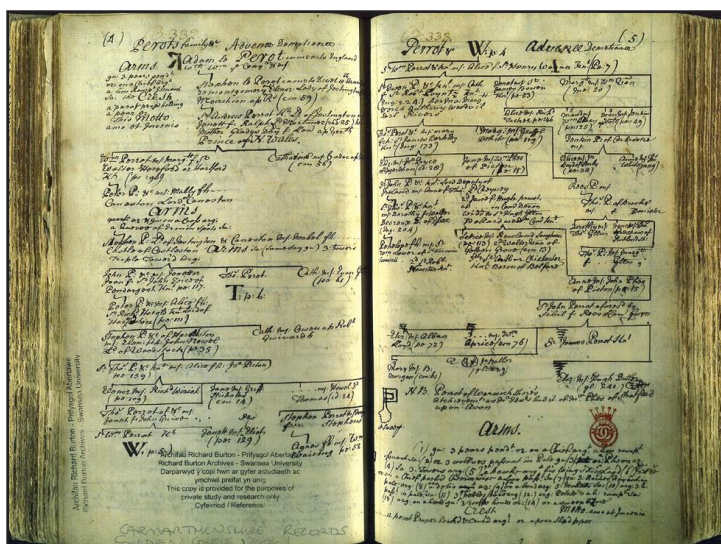
Dr Turvey's robust challenge to accepted accounts also seems at odds with the views of two eminent contemporaries, Francis Jones^{7,1} and Peter Bartrum,⁹ on the 'general accuracy' of genealogies before 1560. The former cites Meyrick's introduction to his transcription of Lewys Dwnn's *Heraldic Visitation* – 'Forgery rarely, if ever, occurred'^{10,1} – and both followed Barnwell in tentatively recognising the historicity of early Perrot generations.

The linkage of numerous supposedly fictional Perrots over 150 years to some undeniably existing people is clearly problematic for Dr Turvey's thesis. The difficulty of accounting for the marriage of an invented William Perrot to the very real Margaret Herford is indeed acknowledged: 'According to the sixteenth-century genealogies, this William married Margaret, the daughter of Sir Walter Herford. This seems to present a problem if this early part of the genealogy is to be regarded as fiction, for Herford did in fact exist and was certainly living in the 1240s'.^{4,2}

Dr Turvey argues the inclusion of William's sister Catherine in Bartrum's modern pedigree 'lends credulity to a myth', but adds: 'On the whole Bartrum's work is reliable.....his main weaknesses are those of omission rather than commission'. In contrast to their records of earlier descents he follows the pedigrees of Barnwell and Bartrum after 1260, though still reliant on 'incidental and indirect evidence for the existence of female members of the Perrot family'.^{4,2}

Dr P.C.Bartrum is now recognised as the foremost modern scholar of this subject. The current authority, Dr Ben Guy, writes: 'Altogether Bartrum's "Welsh Genealogies" is an invaluable and unparalleled prosopographical resource for historians of modern Wales'.¹¹ The 1983 chart (right) is his final and definitive twelfth century Perrot descent which remained unmodified in four subsequent revisions.





The Golden Grove book, Perrot Advenae. Cawdor collection, courtesy of Carmarthenshire Archives.

Bartrum's primary concern was to recreate what the original genealogists were trying to convey from the best MSS sources, not to examine whether or not they were historically accurate.

Nevertheless, he did highlight clear anachronisms and his authoritative comments on transmission and reliability of bardic pedigrees deserve verbatim quotation and include the following of direct relevance here.

'When a poem is approximately contemporary with a genealogy we may expect substantial agreement between the two, because the information for both probably came from the same source, the family itself. Up to the end of the sixteenth century poetry and genealogy often went together. Gutun Owain, Ieuan Brechfa, Lewys Morgannwg, Gruffudd Hiraethog, Wiliam Llyn, Simwnt Fychan and Lewys Dwnn are outstanding examples of poets who interested themselves in genealogy.

One is immediately struck by the steady deterioration in the accuracy of the early parts of genealogies.....after about 1560. In some ways the absence of Welsh surnames during the period was an aid to accuracy, as a person could only be properly identified by giving several generations of his ancestors.

If a pedigree extends sufficiently far backwards, it may stray into the region of legend, that is unless the family concerned has a genuine royal descent, in which case the pedigree may well be substantially correct right back to the dark ages. It is, of course, these long pedigrees that have caused most criticism, but if one realises how such pedigrees were constructed, and appreciates the beliefs of the time, it is easy enough to understand their existence and to decide roughly at what point any pedigree becomes legendary or fictitious.

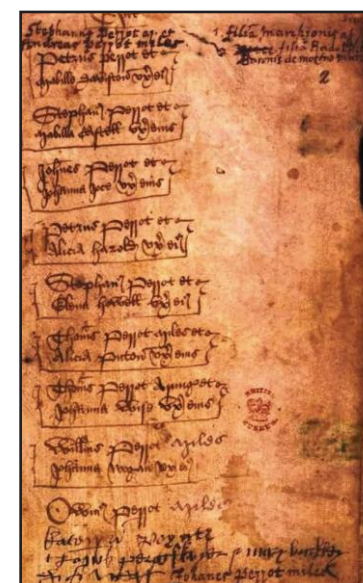
In order to arrive at a reasonably safe pedigree when direct evidence is not available, it is necessary to compare different versions and check collateral lines. I do not believe that any of the better known genealogists were guilty of deliberate falsifying, but suggest that faked pedigrees, when they occurred, were concocted by members or retainers of certain families which wanted to 'improve' their pedigrees.

The Golden Grove Book is the last of the comprehensive manuscript compilations. Much about the history of the book is given by Francis Jones. Just as in the case of David Edwardes's books, the Golden Grove Book is fullest and most reliable for south Wales'.¹² As Francis Jones confirms: 'In view of evidence that has recently come to light it is now possible to describe the history of these manuscripts from their first compilation to the present day. The pedigree of the Protheroe MSS. (from which the Golden Grove books were copied) can be traced with certainty to the late sixteenth century.....the most important, the most exhaustive and most authoritative corpus of Welsh genealogical manuscripts'.¹³

The Perrot descent given in the authoritative Protheroe MSS, as faithfully copied in the Golden Grove collection, matches the three pedigrees examined in Dr Turvey's thesis and hence they could not have been concocted by Sir John, Sir James or their retainers. Barnwell's view of 1867, as confirmed by Bartrum's research, 'it was, however, in Pembrokeshire that the (Perrot) family flourished so extensively and so vigorously from a period soon after the Norman invasion till the reign of Elizabeth',¹⁴ seems to prevail over Dr Turvey's current, and contrary, position: 'Stephen Perrot (d c1338). Founder of the family. Settled at West Popton'.¹⁵

The Haroldston Calendar.

British Library MS 22720.



Perrot Pedigree(parenthesis indicates names translated into English)

Added later
1. Stephan Perrot, 1. Daughter Marchionis ap
2. Andreas Perrot, knight 2. Daughter of Radolphi (Ralph), Baron of the Dead Sea (Mortimer)

Original text
Petrus Perrot and
Mabille (Mabel) Gaviston his wife
Stephan Perrot and
Mabilla (Mabel) Castell (Castle) his wife
Johnes Perrot and
Johanna Joce (Joyce) his wife
Petrus Perrot and
Alicia (Alice) Harold his wife
Stephan Perrot and
Elena (Ellen) Howell his wife
Thomas Perrot knight, and
Alicia Picton his wife
Thomas Perrot armingier and
Johanna Wise his wife
William Perrot knight and
Johanna Wogan his wife
Owen Perrot knight

End of original writing. Added later, in different hand
Kateryn Points (Katherine Poyntz)
Illegible Perrot Illegible Mary Barkley (Berkeley)*
Illegible Illegible Johannes Perrot, knight*

*Also added later, and in a different hand; possibly by the same person who added the first two entries

The insuperable obstacle to any attempt at replacing Peter of Kynaston¹⁵ and all his 12th and 13th century forebears with Sir Ralph of Kent or other contemporary as father of Stephen of Popton (d 1338) is the Haroldston Calendar. It was written between 1474 and 1501 in the hand of Sir William Perrot and so significantly predates his great grandson Sir John's own additions.¹⁶ As an original entry in this early pedigree, it is simply impossible that the paternity of the said Stephen was invented anticipating a Tudor forgery more than a century later.

If the case for substituting Sir Ralph of Kent for Peter of Kynaston is seriously flawed as argued above, and without any other plausible candidate for proband, the historical credibility of the earlier lineage listed in primary genealogical sources can still be cautiously accepted despite the shortage of contemporary corroboration before 1290 thus far discovered. The absence of such evidence may be significant but is not necessarily convincing evidence of absence in light of the testimony from literary genealogy over time – itself the subject of new research.*

During his 1588 *Visitation* Lewys Dwnn consulted (and may have copied into his own work) a pedigree of Sir John's grandfather Sir Owen Perrot (1460-1521), then in the library of his friend George Owen of Cemaes^{10,3} and now part of the Protheroe MSS collection.¹³ It extends the Haroldston Calendar descent back to a twelfth century Welsh royal link and was likely written by Ieuan Brechfa (c1430-1500)¹⁷ who had a pivotal role in the collection and systematic recording of gentry pedigrees in the fifteenth century revival of literary genealogy in south Wales.¹¹

In summary, the case that the Perrots were among those Norman invaders who first settled in Wales during the twelfth century cannot be easily overturned. It is supported by important evidence from the deeply-rooted pedigrees found in the fifteenth century Haroldston Calendar and The Golden Grove Book, itself transcribed from '*the most authoritative manuscripts*' which in turn have preserved some of the earliest and most reliable genealogical traditions.¹²

The provenance provided by these key sources may call into question the use of Dr Turvey's influential 'fabrication' hypothesis elsewhere without appropriate qualification. For example, the official Parliamentary biography

* The view that the later Perrots 'improved' their lineage by allegedly adding prior generations using mythic native traditions may also be tested by analysis of 'textual layering' as in Dr Guy's study of earlier diachronic 'pedigree growth'.¹⁸ (The 'praise poem' composed for a young John Perrot and cited by Dr Turvey as possible evidence of a fictional early descent, was in a later style of bardic verse which often omits the performative genealogical content of the original form. Its lack of reference to his family's regal kinship could therefore be expected).¹⁹

of his son Sir James, claims (arguably implying complicity) that: '*Perrot's family was settled in Pembrokeshire by the end of the thirteenth century, but falsely claimed to have been resident there much earlier*'.²⁰

Another instance is found in a recent article on Narberth castle in which well established traditions of Perrot links to the fortification in an earlier location were discounted as '*spurious*' on this basis.²¹

The responsibility for all conclusions, errors and interpretations in this article is mine alone.

Notes and references

- 1 R.K.Turvey, 'Sir John Perrot (1528-92), A Fourth Centenary Retrospective'. *Journal of the Pembrokeshire Historical Society* Vol. 5, 1992, p17. (I am indebted to Dr Roger Turvey for sharing his research findings about Lewys Dwnn and also thank him for reading a draft of this article and making valuable suggestions for its improvement).
- 2 R.K.Turvey, *A critical edition of Sir James Perrot's 'The life and deedes of Sir John Perrot, knight'* (Edwin Mellen Press New York, 2002).
- 3 *Dictionary of Welsh Biography: Lewys Dwnn* (c1550-c1616).
- 4.1 R.K.Turvey, Unpublished Doctoral Thesis (Swansea University, 1988), p22.
- 4.2 *Ibid*, p23.
- 4.3 *Ibid*, p37.
- 5 Henry Owen, *Old Pembroke Families* (London 1902), p52.
- 6 R.K.Turvey, 'Admiration or Revulsion: Interpreting the Life, Career and Character of Sir James Perrot (1571-1637)' *Journal of the Pembrokeshire Historical Society* Vol. 11, 2002.p1
- 7 F. Jones, *An Approach to Welsh Genealogy*, (Cymmrodorion address, December 1948), p380.
- 7.1 *Ibid*, p304.
- 8 G.E.Cokayne, *Complete Peerage* (St Catherine's Press, London, 1945) Vol 10. p473. (My thanks to Prof. Wayne Parrott of Georgia Univ. for his research advice on the Perrots of Kent).
- 9 P.C.Bartrum, *Welsh Genealogies AD 1400-1500* (Aberystwyth 1974) Vol XI, pp1435-7.
- 10.1 S.R.Meyrick, *Lewys Dwnn, 'Heraldic Visitations of Wales and Part of The Marches'* (Llandovery 1846) Vol 1, pp x, xi, etc.
- 10.2 *Ibid*, p xiii.
- 10.3 *Ibid*, p xxix.
- 11 B.Guy, *Medieval Welsh Genealogy: An Introduction and Textual Study*, (Woodbridge, 2020) pp45-6. (My thanks to Dr Ben Guy of Cambridge University for his comments after reading a draft of this article).
- 12 P.C.Bartrum, 'Notes on Welsh Genealogical Manuscripts' *Cymmrodorion* (1968), p92. (My thanks to Prof. Patrick Sims-Williams of Aberystwyth University for his comments on Dr Bartrum's research).
- 13 F. Jones, *An Approach to Welsh Genealogy*, (Cymmrodorion address, December 1948), p466..
- 14 E.L.Barnwell, *Perrot Notes* (London, 1867), pp4-10.
- 15 R.K.Turvey, 'A History & Survey of Haroldston', *Archaeologia Cambrensis* Vol 151 (2002), p140.
- 16 R.K.Turvey, 'Until Death Do Us Part' *Journal of the Pembrokeshire Historical Society* Vol 18(2009). Note 29.
- 17 B.Guy, 'Brut Ieuan Brechfa', *The Chronicles of Medieval Wales* (Brepols 2020), pp375-419.
- 18 B.Guy, 'The Earliest Welsh Genealogies: Textual Layering and the Phenomenon of "Pedigree Growth"', *Early Medieval Europe*, vol.32:4 (2018), p485.
- 19 R.K.Turvey, 'Sir John Perrot: Henry VIII's Bastard?', *Cymmrodorion* (1992), p80.
- 20 Andrew Thrush, 'PERROT, Sir James (c.1572-1637)', *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1604-1629*, (Cambridge 2010).
- 21 Neil Ludlow, 'The Castle and Lordship of Narberth' *Journal of the Pembrokeshire Historical Society* Vol 12 (2003), p5.